

Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council Accomplishments

Updated 6/28/11

The Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council (SWFCAC) or (Council) was created by statute. The statute was formally signed in to law at the DCFS Annual Spring Foster Parent Conference in Peoria in June, 1995, after a more than seven year effort by foster parents, DCFS and other supporters. The Council is comprised of 22 members who are appointed by the DCFS Director, including foster parent representatives from each of the 6 DCFS regions and non-DCFS persons with recognized expertise in foster care. Working in concert with DCFS, the Council has accumulated many significant achievements in the interest of foster parents as well as children in foster care and their families. Some of the more recent accomplishments are listed below.

Partnering With Parents Summits

In an effort to build relationships between birth parents and foster parents, in 2010 and 2011 SWFCAC members joined birth parents at the Partnering with Parents Annual Downstate Summits.

Differential Response

In November, 2009, Director McEwen requested the SWFCAC establish a joint committee with the Illinois Adoption Advisory Council to consider further how foster and adoptive parents might support families served through differential response in their local communities. Differential response is an optional plan with a quick turnaround (90-days) for cases where there is little or no risk to the child, based on an assessment rather than an investigation. The joint committee sent the Director a memo containing their recommendations in March, 2010.

Respite Committee

In October 2009 the SWFCAC formed a Respite Committee and joined with the Illinois Respite Coalition to suggest a uniform definition of respite that expands the current definition. In September, 2010, the committee submitted their recommendations to the Director.

Parent Café Design Team

The SWFCAC formed a committee in July 2009 that worked with Strengthening Families Illinois to develop Parent Café's designed specifically for foster parents. The focus of the first café was taking care of yourself, the second was about how to be a strong foster parent, and the third focused on building a strong relationship with your child. After trial runs of the Foster Parent Cafes at support group meetings in DeKalb, Chicago and Bloomington, the Foster Parent Café's were officially rolled out at the August, 2010 Caregivers Conference, and they have continued to be offered in various areas of the state.

UIC Steering Committee

The SWFCAC is represented on the UIC Steering Committee. The Jane Addams College of Social Work at the University of Illinois was selected to administer a new child welfare traineeship project to help ensure that social workers are prepared through their college education to pursue careers in child welfare. The program provides a \$9,000 stipend to selected students in the final year of their master's of social work program. A committee made up of different agencies and DCFS staff meets quarterly to review and lead this project. The Council is represented on this committee. The committee follows students through the duration of the 2 year child welfare masters program making sure students are taking the right classes and are not
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overwhelmed. Students must also complete an internship with one of the selected agencies. The hope is that turnover won't be so high after graduates become permanently employed. They make a commitment to work in child welfare for one year.

FPSS Recruitment Committee

In May 2009 Director McEwen asked the SWFCAC to form a committee to develop recommendations on adding a team of Foster Parent Support Specialists to serve specifically as recruiters. The committee developed a job description for a FPSS recruiter position, as well as suggesting where to place these positions. A memo with these recommendations was sent to the Director in March, 2010.

Bed Hold Policy Revisions

The Cook South Regional Council brought this issue to the attention of the Statewide Council in 2007. A revision had been made to the DCFS "bed hold" policy, reducing or eliminating foster parent reimbursement for maintaining space for a child while the child was hospitalized. There was also concern about the expectation for the foster parents to attend staffings during this time, noting that when funds are removed foster parents believed that contact with the child would also be restricted. Discussion centered around the system's inability to pay two entities under the 906, restrictions built into CAPU, rules about payments made under medical cards, and the importance of foster parents remaining involved in the lives of children who have been hospitalized.

SWFCAC members addressed this issue with Acting Director McEwen. When the impact on foster parents was explained, the Director indicated that he would have his staff review the issue to find better ways to manage it. After further discussion with staff, the policy was revised again, with payments to foster parents in these situations approved retroactively to December 1, 2006.

Federal Review

A council member served as co-chair of the Internal Review Committee to prepare DCFS for the federal review in 2006.

FY'07 Board Rate Increase

Council members discussed with the Director, and then worked individually, and at their own expense, to testify at hearings, arrange conference calls with foster/adoptive parents, and sent out mailings to other foster/adoptive parents to advocate for a cost of living increase for foster parents. This was not solely a SWFCAC project; however, members' individual efforts, in conjunction with those of the Child Care Association and other interested parties, made a great impact. A three percent COLA was approved effective 7/1/06.

"Avoiding Germs" Brochure and Material in Foster Parent Handbook

Council members provided feedback on the development of a brochure to be shared with caregivers, and to be included in the Foster Parent Handbook.

Youth Initiatives

In 2005 the SWFCAC formalized an alliance with the Department's Statewide Youth Advisory Board (SWYAB). The two groups meet annually, and in subcommittees as necessary, to discuss issues of concern.

*SWFCAC has a subcommittee devoted to working with adolescent issues, with a goal that this committee as practicable serve with members of the Youth Advisory Board.

*Sibling Rights Workgroup - Council members were Governor-appointed to this workgroup to work with other interested entities on a Sibling Rights (legislative) Resolution. Public hearings were held, and a report was written.

Training Efforts

SWFCAC members are frequently asked to participate as trainers, content or practice experts or panelists for various foster parent and staff trainings. They have also individually participated in trainings of new caseworkers, as well as assisting in reviewing curricula. Specifically:

*Training on Needs of Children with Sexual Behavior Problems - SWFCAC members worked with DCFS to develop training curriculum regarding children with sexual behavior challenges.

*Caregiver Training Institutes – Council members annually participate on the planning committee to inform and lead development of the caregiver training institutes. They also voluntarily participate as trainers at each of the sites.

*On an ongoing basis, as requested by the DCFS Training Office, council members serve directly on work committees that develop and amend training curricula.

*SWFCAC was successful in securing a permanent situation whereby members have opportunities to train new direct service workers.

*Members serve as PRIDE trainers and core trainers along with staff and other professional trainers to train foster parents in pre-service curriculum and ongoing in-service modules.

*The Council advised on the development of Trauma Training from the foster parent perspective, with some foster parent members being trained to serve as trainers of the curriculum.

*Members devise and deliver training to DCFS administrative regions and all POS agencies regarding compliance with the Foster Parent Law in order to prepare them for the annual implementation plans and the subsequent reviews conducted by Council members.

*The Chairperson serves on the Curriculum Training Advisory Council, formed in September 2007, to assist in reviewing curriculum before it is rolled out.

Host Family Program/Care Package Program

These programs grew from a recommendation that was developed on 7/11/03 at a joint meeting of the SWFCAC and the Statewide Youth Advisory Board Meeting. The Council oversaw and advised on the development of programs developed to assist youth served by the child welfare system who are away at college. The Host Family Program operated for one year, then it was transferred to another division and not continued. The Care Package Program was also transferred to that other DCFS division and it is currently being resurrected.

School Records Act

In 2003, members of the Council were made aware of **Public Act 92-0295**. Because of the concerns expressed by these experienced foster parents and the expert social workers on this council, members established a committee to conduct an informal survey of the schools in their areas and to report back to the council. Their serious concerns were validated by that survey. SWFCAC worked with the DCFS Legal and Legislative offices to explore the feasibility of amending the statute.

Revising Rule & Procedure

The Council, as a matter of standard DCFS practice, receives the content of all proposed new and amended policy related to foster care and has the authority to submit written comments on that policy during the first internal review in the Department. Examples of their work include but are not limited to:

Rule 402 - Assisted in completely revamping these foster home licensing rule and procedures from 1999-2001.

Rule 340 - Developed much of the text to implement the Foster Parent Law.

Rule 301 - Older Caregivers - Served on a committee to ensure the policy is sensitive, fair and non-discriminatory.

Hot Water Regulations

The SWFCAC made a recommendation to not require hot water regulation devices to be installed in all foster homes. Members served on a committee that included high-ranking members of the DCFS administration; they met with the Inspector General; and they had major influence and were successful in coming up with a more workable policy solution. DCFS and the Office of the Inspector General accepted the Council's recommendation, and they amended policy appropriately.

Foster Parent Support Specialist Program

The SWFCAC maintains a subcommittee that occasionally meets with Operations leadership to address ongoing issues in support of the Foster Parent Support Specialists program. They have been successful in lobbying for continuation of the program. From 2000-2002, they helped DCFS develop updated program plans for support specialists and leads.

Clothing Vouchers

SWFCAC members advocated for a simplified method of purchasing clothing for children placed in foster homes. DCFS accepted their recommendations and worked with the Council to create a more convenient process for POS agencies. DCFS also committed to develop new systems for DCFS-supervised homes, acting on advice from the Council.

Foster Parent Wallet ID Cards

All licensed foster parents receive wallet size ID cards that identify them as foster parents, and includes their foster parent provider ID number. DCFS implemented this process and continues to provide these cards to newly licensed foster parents. The Council developed the original idea and then lobbied for DCFS to accept it, consulting with DCFS throughout its development. Foster parents continue to receive these cards.

Medical Exam Process/Forms for Foster Parents

SWFCAC members submitted comments and revisions to the originally-proposed form and medical examination protocol. Council members met with the Inspector General and negotiated the format and content of the form and the actual examination protocol, making it less invasive for foster parents. DCFS followed these recommendations and implemented the revised form and protocol.

Implementation of the Foster Parent Law

SWFCAC members made recommendations on the process for implementing the Foster Parent Law. DCFS accepted those recommendations. DCFS and SWFCAC then worked together to develop Rule 340 - members wrote much of the rule's text. The SWFCAC also worked with DCFS Deputy Directors and the POS agencies to develop and implement an on-site implementation review process. Council members now score the annual Implementation Plans, and also conduct on-site reviews at agencies and regions to determine how well the Foster Parent Law is being implemented. This process requires a great deal of volunteer time and work for Council members each year. This work meets the statutory requirement for the Council to oversee the implementation of the Foster Parent Law.